PRIORITIZATION 2.0 OUTREACH SUMMARY
December 7, 2010

The purpose of this document is to summarize feedback received from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (the Department's) Prioritization 2.0 outreach efforts. Feedback was received during a series of Listening Sessions and an online survey of key customers, partners and stakeholders. The summary includes feedback from questions asked in the survey and at the Sessions and provides an overview of the input received regarding how to improve the current prioritization process managed by the Department. This summary is not intended to reflect every individual comment submitted in either the Listening Sessions or the online survey.

INTRODUCTION

The Department convened four Listening Sessions in November and posted an online survey from October 27, 2010 through November 16, 2010 to gather input on revisions and improvements to consider for Prioritization 2.0 (P2.0). P2.0 is the Department's second strategic prioritization process with the stated goal to enhance and build upon the success of the Department's first prioritization process (P1.0) which concluded in August 2010 with the release of the Department's 10 Year Work Program. Developing and continuing to enhance data-driven prioritization processes are a direct result of the Transportation Reform initiative.

P2.0 focuses on increased collaboration and partnership with stakeholders to drive an enhanced methodology for scoring and ranking projects. The process is also expected to improve the user interface experience and overall ability to submit, store and process project data. P2.0 is scheduled to "go live" in the late spring of 2011, when candidate projects are submitted for evaluation and ranking.

In addition to the Listening Sessions and the October/November survey period, the Department is actively seeking feedback from the Prioritization 2.0 / Mobility Fund Workgroup that was established in August 2010. The 24 member Work group is made up of Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Regional Planning Organization (RPO) representatives as well as other key partner agencies and several Department staff. This Workgroup is also providing input and guidance for developing selection criteria for the Mobility Fund.

LISTENING SESSIONS

The sessions were open to the public, and the Department made a special effort to reach out to planning partners by sending email notices to each MPO and RPO. The sessions were well attended, with good representation from MPOs

and RPOs. In total over 160 participants attended sessions held in Raleigh, Kinston, Greensboro and Morganton.

Don Voelker, Director of the Strategic Planning Office of Transportation (SPOT) for the Department, opened each meeting by welcoming the participants and emphasizing the purpose of the meeting was to listen to thoughts and suggestions for revisions and improvements to the Department's prioritization processes. In the reviewing the agenda for the meeting, he noted that both highways and non-highway modes would be discussed and indicated that even after Prioritization 2.0 is developed and put into place it's highly likely that process would continue to be evaluated and updated over time.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES

The Department chose to use the popular online survey tool known as SurveyMonkey to solicit feedback. That survey was posted and available for comment from October 27 to November 16. One hundred and seventy one individuals responded to the survey; the meaningful trends and observations resulting from the responses are summarized below.

- 63% of respondents stated the current prioritization process needs improvement/tweaks vs. a major overhaul (31%) or no change at all (6%). This is an indication that SPOT has laid a strong and broadly accepted way of scoring and ranking projects but there is still room to investigate change and make improvements.

- 78% of respondents stated highway projects should continue to be ranked by NCDOT Goal (mobility, infrastructure health, safety) and Tier (statewide, regional, and subregional). This is an indication that there is broad acceptance to how projects are initially organized and that structure needs to continue moving forward.

- 54% of respondents indicated ranking the TOP 25 highway projects for the qualitative score should be amended; however, 46% said to leave it unchanged.

- A large majority of respondents (84%) stated that a Benefit-Cost component should be added to the scoring of highway projects

- Over 60% of respondents stated economic impact considerations (such as job creation, increased wages, indirect benefits) stemming from the highway investment should be considered as part of highway project scoring.

- Over 55% of respondents favored ranking highway projects by individual segments vs. by entire TIP project limits. These results suggest there is

enough interest for the Department to consider injecting more flexibility in how projects are ranked; this ensures smaller segments of TIP projects (quicker constructability) compete well with larger, longer roadway projects.

- 55% of respondents favored allowing NCDOT to rank Infrastructure Health and Safety projects 100% by data. Pavement and crash data is already primarily collected by the Department and the data systems used to analyze and identify project solutions is being enhanced.

- 60% of respondents answered "neutral" to the question of how well they perceived training by Department staff on the prioritization process. This is an indication that the Department has more work to do to improve its communication and explanation of this important process.

SUMMARY OF LISTENING SESSIONS

Highways

General Overview:
Taken together, comments received during the Listening Sessions indicated that major changes to P1.0 for highway project prioritization are not needed at this time, although participants did call for some changes and improvements in response to questions designed as conversation starters. Interestingly, respondents to the survey were much more adamant in their responses to questions in terms of calling for changes to highway prioritization processes. A short summary of the themes that emerged around specific conversation starter questions is provided below.

Revisions to Existing P1.0 Process

Should the qualitative ranking of Top 25 projects be changed?

First, there was clear consensus that the qualitative ranking portion of the scoring must remain. However, the scoring methodology could possibly be changed. Currently MPOs and RPOs are asked to rank and submit a list of their top 25 projects. While all submitted projects are scored, the reality is that fewer than a handful of projects will be selected from any single MPO/RPO region. History shows that rarely are more than 10-12 projects selected for a region; therefore, the Department has requested the top 25 rank so that it can better take public priorities into account. The question on the table was whether MPOs/RPOs should rank more projects or fewer projects.

While there was some support in the Listening Sessions for the notion that MPOs/RPOs should rank more projects, several participants pointed out that

would be a waste of time and effort for the MPOs/RPOs as the Department doesn't have enough money to select more than 25 projects for a given region. A review of the draft Work Program shows that no area received more than 13 projects. The consensus from among Listening Session participants was to leave the 25 number alone because no area will ever get to 25. Also, MPOs/RPOs did not support the idea of ranking fewer projects because it's difficult to develop regional consensus around a group of projects if the list is too small.

One comment was to base submittals on population of area with ranges (10-15 projects per area). If equity is applied at the end, does it really matter how many projects are ranked? Another comment was to give a quantitative score to subregional tier facilities. Another was to place a cap on submittals. And another comment was there should be a limit to the number of projects the Divisions can submit.

A few areas also would like the ability to rank projects that are not within their geographical boundaries.

Should Control Total (points) be used in lieu of "Top 25"?
Participants were asked their thoughts on using a "control point" approach where areas can assign up to 100 points to the projects they submit in whatever manner they choose to indicate local priority. For example, an area could assign 100 points to a single project to indicate its importance or 10 points to 10 projects, or use any other combination. Currently the Department assigns points on a pre-determined 4 point scale based on the ranking (i.e., the first ranked project is assigned 100 points, the second ranked project is assigned 96 points and so on). Some MPO/RPO representatives responded positively to that approach, liking the flexibility and ability to more clearly indicated priority. However, other representatives did not like the approach as it would be more difficult to reach regional consensus when independently assigning specific points to projects. As one person commented, "It's good in theory, but politically difficult."

Some felt it would be hard to balance community needs with an MPO/RPO versus putting all points on one project. In regard to linking the number of projects to be ranked or the number of control points to something like regional population or number of road miles, there was broad agreement that each region should rank the same number of projects or have the same number of control points to allocate.

Overall there was more support for the idea of using control points than the current approach of ranking the Top 25 among Listening Session participants, but, but not everyone agreed.

Should Infrastructure Health and Safety Projects be Selected 100% Based on Data? Alpesh Patel, reported that over 90% percent of projects submitted

under P1.0 were mobility projects. Additionally, Alpesh noted that a robust preservation management system known as "Agile Assets" which optimizes preservation actions is being implemented by the Department. Because of the general lack of infrastructure health and safety projects being submitted along with the nearing implementation of Agile Assets, SPOT asked if perhaps MPOs/RPOs would rather not have to submit infrastructure health and safety projects.

Consensus among Listening Session participants is to remove Infrastructure Health projects from SPOT prioritization. There was also consensus to remove Safety projects from SPOT prioritization **if** there is stronger communication between MPOs, RPOs, and NCDOT on safety projects – and this sentiment was echoed in every listening session.

One area was concerned whether Interstate Maintenance (IM) and Safety projects would use up all the equity dollars.

Should Project Ranking be Based on Segments or TIP Project Limits?
No overall consensus among Listening Session participants regarding whether projects should be ranked by segment or TIP project limits; however, more participants voiced support for ranking to be done by segment. If ranking continues by TIP project limit, then local officials want the ability to advise the Department on which segment within the TIP project has the highest priority.

Participants at one Listening Session did not support the idea of ranking by segment because of a long rail corridor with many crossings. They are concerned that each rail crossing would use a ranking if rankings were done by segments. Another person indicated that under the NEPA environmental process, projects are considered as whole TIP projects so projects should continue to be ranked that way. One other person asked if there was some way to combine the two methods. Still others said just create as much flexibility as possible.

Should Benefit-Cost be a ranking criterion?

The consensus of the listening sessions is that a benefit–cost criterion might not yet be ready for introduction into P 2.0. However, this is just the opposite of the on-line survey results which showed that 84% of the respondents said a benefit-cost component should be included in the ranking criteria.

Most of the concerns are that benefit-cost methodology is still an unknown activity. The concept is acceptable but the concern is with the details of how a benefit-cost methodology will be defined, scored and weighted. There is also a concern that the mountainous areas or urban areas will suffer because of a belief that construction costs are typically higher in these areas. Also, smaller projects are perceived as not scoring as well as larger projects due to benefits accruing to

fewer transportation users. Clearly, there was a desire that if benefit-cost is pursued as a criterion, that much more information needs to be provided so everyone has a better understanding of how it will be measured.

Should Economic Impact be a ranking criterion?
The consensus of the listening sessions is that economic impact might not yet ready for introduction into P 2.0. However, this is just the opposite of the on-line survey results in which 65% of the respondents indicated that some form of economic impact should be a ranking criterion.

Multiple concerns were expressed including: how will economic impact be measured, what factors or data will be measured, can the methodology be uniformly applied across the state and if economic impacts are assessed, should long term job impact be the sole factor. The rural vs. urban issue also appeared to be a concern with rural areas primarily expressing concern that their projects would not be fairly evaluated.

Others indicated that economic impact analysis might be too complex to be introduced in P2.0. Others were simply unsure of the idea and indicated that if economic impact is weighted very low then is it worth the effort to include it.

Others said consider using it as an "other factor" to be considered in case of ties or after rankings are completed use it as a factor in programming projects which have similar rankings.

Should Local Contribution be a ranking criterion?
Overall input from the Listening Sessions indicates that local contribution should not be included as a criterion, but participants from at least one area said to include it or at least find a way to give it "bonus points". Local funding is simply not available to all local governments/organizations. Some believe the better financed organizations will have an unfair advantage and rural and/or underdeveloped areas may not be able to compete. There was the concern that politics could be inserted into the process if local contribution were a factor. Some were not sure whether a local contribution might impact equity.

Others wondered how local contribution would be defined and what sort of documentation or inter-government agreement would be required.

Should other programs like CMAQ, Enhancement Program, Direct Attributable (DA), Feasibility Studies be prioritized?

CMAQ – Most of the participants from the four listening sessions said there is an allocation process already in place, and a prioritization process is not needed. However, this comment was not universally shared amongst the participants. Some participants indicated that CMAQ projects should be prioritized.

Prioritization could become a bigger issue once the new air quality standards are announced and resulting additional non-attainment counties are determined.

DA Attributable – Consensus was that MPOs already have say in what gets funded. No need to prioritize.

Enhancement – Consensus was there is no need to prioritize enhancement program; however, some participants said there has not been a call in several years so would it be worth the exercise to develop prioritization criteria. Other participants said to continue to allocate funds but not prioritize   In terms of general comments, some questions were raised regarding how a bike-pedestrian project is compared to a historic rail station.

Feasibility Studies – Local officials indicated some interest in prioritizing feasibility studies so they would have some sense of what projects are coming up next.

Other Key Input

Additional input received during the Listening Sessions is summarized below:

- There was consensus among participants that the Department needs to provide better definitions and more clarity around the definition of projects.

- Some projects are typically too small for consideration as a TIP project, yet too large for a Division to handle (large drainage project was given as an example). How should these be handled?

- Spot safety type projects should be submitted in the SPOT template request for candidate projects.

- The Department should have projects on the shelf and ready to go should funding become available.

- The Department should revisit definitions of tiers for bicycle and pedestrian and public transportation.

- Every TIP project should have its own webpage.

- The Department should be mindful that not everyone has internet access. The State needs to invest more in rural broadband and consider equipping the Department's District offices with broadband.

- The Department should be sure to reach disabled and non-English speaking population.

- Consider complete streets concepts in P 2.0.

- Final Project rankings need to be provided by Division AND Statewide ranking.

Non-Highways

Top leadership in the Department requested the non-highway modal units develop data-driven project prioritization methodologies to be used in P 2.0. The units completed their draft methodologies and used the listening sessions to roll out these drafts. Participants at the listening sessions appreciated the efforts of Department staff and recognized there is less data available for the non-highway modes. A summary of comments and questions from the Listening Sessions regarding each non-highway mode is provided below.

Bicycle-Pedestrian

- Some participants expressed concern that rural projects won't compete well and the scoring factors are skewed to urbanized areas due to the density factor. Some participants suggested considering connectivity as a balancing factor. Participants also expressed concern that "young" systems won't compete well.

- Consider funding planning studies first and develop a more holistic approach, ie. Greenway concepts.

- Multi-use projects (bicycle and pedestrian projects) are bicycle projects. If a project is in multiple plans, it should get more points.

- Several comments were received about the need for better scoring and accounting for incidental projects as that's how most bicycle and pedestrian projects are built.

- Several participants wanted to ensure that the Department will be integrating the "complete streets policy" into projects and if a method can be found to "bake" this into the scoring criteria, to do so.

- Ensure projects are not penalized because they are not categorized in the right place and focus on better definitions prior to new window.

- How is the Right-of-Way (ROW) criteria measured? Is by percent of land mass acquired, number of parcels, and percent of cost? Should ROW points be based on distance of route?

- Is ROW self reported? Could it be Yes/No answer and how will it be confirmed/demonstrated to be accurate?

- Crashes may be over-emphasized. What if it's a greenway system and there's no perpendicular route which would tend to increase the crash rate? Also, what about incidental versus independent facilities and calculation of crash data. Perhaps crash data could be calculated using data from a parallel facility.

- Clarify that local areas can provide their own crash data and the Department will use it.

- How is a greenway on new alignment scored? Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian needs to provide definitions to define the corridor.

- Don't limit the number of submittals but only rank/give points to the top five.

- Under demand, how will seasonal population be factored? Also, clarify how density will be calculated, i.e. US Census data by block; employment through US Census too – use a buffer (1-1.5 miles). Consider using density as a tie-breaker.

- Regarding the Department's ranking, there needs to be more clarity around what is meant by Division input. Consider using equity formula.

- How will projects that cross MPO/RPO or Division lines be ranked?

- Will the Department fund regional bike plans? Also, will projects in unincorporated areas be funded?

- If the Department will be asking for more info up front, then RPOs/MPOs request standard definitions and for everything local governments need to provide. Ensure web technology is set up for local government staff to enter all bicycle and pedestrian data.

- Some want a scoring factor to deal with motorized modes and bicycle and pedestrian mode and the variance in speed. Lower volume, lower speed facility should rank lower versus higher speed, higher volume facilities.

- Increase the budget for bicycle and pedestrian independent projects.

Public Transportation

- Concern was expressed that the prioritization process is biased toward growing the rural transit system. The Department indicated policy focus is on growing the rural system.

- Clarify that applicants can/should bundle projects (e.g., include sidewalk projects in transit applications).

- Clarify tier and goal criteria and definitions that are being proposed.

- Several participants want the Department to commit more funds to transit and wanted to know how they can help make this happen.

- Shelters fall into modern facilities category, route info falls into technology category.

- Clearly there was consensus is that clarification is needed on how points are calculated per candidate project. Also, there should be no limits on the number of projects an MPO can submit. Some participants are not sure whether more points should be awarded for hybrid buses – they don't want to be penalized for technology that doesn't work. It also was not clear what funds would be subject to the proposed prioritization (State funds) and how much funding the State invests in transit each year.

- Some participants wanted to know if the Department has been coordinating with transit providers to explain new process and the Department's response is that a series of work sessions will be scheduled throughout the State.

- Clarification is needed on who is entering the data. MPOs/RPOs will lead in providing transit data. Currently RPOs are not entering transit data in rural areas. Part of the goal of the new approach is to see how much transit funds are going to individual areas.

- Some participants wanted to know who is the local body for Statewide Tier projects and the response was the MPO. Also, staff advised that Intermodal terminals are considered Statewide tier. City and county systems are in sub-regional tier.

- Several questions were asked about how the four criteria are weighted against each other. Some participants believe the criterion is not relevant and some projects may end up with only a few points. Will the ranking portion be used to determine whether the local program is comprehensive? This might help local providers decide if they should go after expansion, infrastructure health or safety projects.

- Some participants expressed concern about reconciling competition between city and county level transit systems within one jurisdiction. Rural systems are funded via a different funding source than Urban systems. The STIP will show what rural projects are currently funded. Local staff needs to review and see what else needs to be added to the STIP list.

- Some participants stated that local staff faces challenges of balancing needs/rank. The level of participation of local government providers varies across the State. The Department staff said they would work more on MPO and RPO staff interaction.

Rail

- Many MPO's expressed a desire to have more interaction with the Department's Rail Division and to have a better understanding of how project decisions are made.

- Department staff indicated they are seeking any local input that is relevant to the project.

- MPOs expressed the desire to start conversations regarding high speed/commuter rail projects, even if those projects reach far into the future. Local governments can submit projects to SPOT and they should be ranked.

- Several participants requested that rail intersection rankings be posted.

- Some participants wanted to know if the Department has plans to add rail capacity and the response was that additional studies will be done.

- In response to a question about "intermodal", rail staff indicated they work closely with Public Transportation staff to address "last mile" connections. Financing is through earmarks or enhancement funds.

- There was a question whether counts for freight are included in the scoring process and the response was yes, because of the many passenger/freight track sharing agreements.

- In response to a question regarding whether any funds are available for abandoned rights-of-way was yes, when possible. It was also stated that a MPO could put a project together and seek funds to preserve an abandoned right of way. Department staff encouraged submittal of there types of projects.

- There were several question related to shortline railroads, i.e. matching requirements and are grade crossings included. Department staff agreed to research the questions and indicated that the Department typically funds industrial access type projects.

Ferry

- Several participants wanted to know if there is a role for local governments in the ferry project prioritization process. RPOs/MPOs can submit projects but don't calculate points now. Maybe there could be a role in discussing capacity needs.

- In response to a question whether Ferry service can be established in the interior of the state, the answer is yes.

Aviation

- Several participants wanted to know if there was a role for MPOs and RPOs in aviation project prioritization. MPO's would welcome ability to input rankings which could be used to help NCDOT prioritize projects. Currently these projects and ranking are essentially a standalone process.

- Department staff indicated that it is time to engage city/county officials on aviation needs and the conversation can start with a project in the STIP.

- In response to a question whether funds are available to upgrade a general aviation airport to a commercial service, Department staff advised that funding is demand and industry driven. A hard look is given to those airports that can generate jobs/impact to the local economy.

- In response to a question whether there is any way to incentivize the connection between airports and transit, staff advised that airports are off State right of way and airports typically use surface lots/parking spots to generate revenue. Typically $500,000 per year is invested to improve connections to RDU, Greensboro, Charlotte airports.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will provide this summary to the Workgroup and discuss it with them at the December 15 Workgroup meeting. The results of their discussions will be shared with the Department and a final decision will be made on which changes should be implemented in Prioritization 2.0.